

SÃO PAULO CONSULTATION WORKSHOP REPORT

AI and Children in Latin America and the Caribbean

Office of Global Insight and Policy
Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Child Rights Policy Project
9-10 March 2020 | São Paulo, Brazil

Background

As part of the [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) and Child Rights Policy Project](#), UNICEF, in partnership with the Government of Finland, is hosting a series of workshops around the world to gain regional perspectives on AI systems and children. These conversations will help UNICEF develop a policy guidance on how to promote children's development in AI strategies and practices.

The fourth workshop was held in São Paulo, Brazil, on 9 and 10 March 2020, in partnership with Cetic.br. Experts from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Jamaica, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay gathered to provide their views on AI and children. A wide range of organizations were represented, including the Berkman Klein Center, Brazil's Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovation and Communications, Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, Center of Innovation for Brazilian Education, Chile's Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation, Claro Brasil, Electronic Frontier Foundation, Facebook, Faro Digital, Fast Shop S/A, Fundación Ceibal, Fundación Datos Protegidos, Google, Ilhasoft, Instituto Alana, InternetLab, ITS Rio, Lemann Foundation, Olabi, SaferNet Brasil, SAP, Talk2U, TEDIC, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and academics from universities in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay.

The two-day workshop was opened by Lasse Keisalo, Head of the Consulate of Finland in São Paulo with Demi Getschko, the Director and President of NIC.br and Florence Bauer, UNICEF's Brazil representative. They spoke about the central importance of children's rights in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the need to act now to help children understand the implications of AI. Additionally, they spoke about the potential for AI to address inequity in the world, rather than replicate it.

The workshop participants were asked to provide feedback on the draft UNICEF [policy recommendations](#) and [principles for AI and child rights](#), as detailed below. The agenda also included lightning presentations on AI issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as a panel discussion on the implementation of AI and ICT policies in the region. UNICEF is grateful for the active participation of the attendees and looks forward to continued efforts by key organizations to realize the potential of AI for children in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For more information, please:

- See the workshop [agenda](#)
- Download the workshop [presentations](#)
- View the workshop [photos](#)
- Read [reflections from participants](#) on how to build child-friendly AI that empowers children in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Read the [summary of an expert AI meeting](#) held in Sao Paulo in December 2019, as preparation for the workshop.

AI Principles for Children in Latin America and the Caribbean

The workshop participants discussed the following [draft principles for AI and children](#), within the context of the [recommendation pillars](#) of Protect, Provide and Empower.

Discussion highlights

- Overall, participants noted that a key challenge in designing and implementing the principles is knowing how to involve children since they are not technical AI experts. Approaches should include ways to consult them in the design and testing phase of AI systems, and understanding their needs, concerns and ideas.
- One of the five groups felt that each of the principles are important and necessary to empower children in an AI world. As such, all the principles need to operate in unison and cannot be envisioned as independent of each other. Another group selected the principle that supports children's data agency as the top principle to ensure the agency of children to own, access and delete their data used by AI systems. They consider this, by definition, to be most aligned with children's empowerment. Another group suggested that the first principle to uphold child rights can serve as an umbrella for the remaining principles.
- Several participants felt that certain principles are too broad (e.g. inclusion of children), while others were perceived as too narrow (e.g. support of data agency) and that they should all operate at the same level. A key recommendation was to try to make the guidelines more specific because if they are too general, no one will feel addressed.
- It was discussed that children's evolving capacity should be recognized in the AI principles. While children are defined as 'all persons under the age of 18', there are big developmental differences among specific age groups. Therefore, categorizing children's responsibilities and capacities by age may be the best course moving forward.
- Some struggled with the definition of the word 'agency' because its social meaning differs from its technical meaning. The term may have varied connotations depending on the field it is used in. For example, in the educational field, 'agency' may be understood to mean responsibility. One participant described the need to interrogate this meaning and how it is applied to different age groups because this implies legal capacity. For instance, the right to enter into agreements in relation to the use of data.



Challenges for Child-friendly AI

- **Unequal access to digital infrastructure** is a challenge, particularly between urban and rural areas. This is especially problematic because AI requires robust infrastructure.
- **Digital literacy** programs need to be integrated into school curriculums and constantly updated due to the fast-paced nature of technological change and innovation. Although adults may perceive children as having an intuitive relationship with technology, this does not mean that children are engaging with it critically.
- **The lack of evidence on the impact of AI** needs to be addressed to fully understand the risks that children are facing. Without evidence, policymakers may have fictional ideas about what AI is and can achieve. The development of case studies would greatly help inform policy and regulation in the region. In conjunction, impact metrics will also need to be considered to evaluate how this information will be analyzed.
- **Information asymmetries** pervade discussions on AI and its impacts. This affects stakeholder's ability to define AI, distinguish fact from fiction, and understand its actual capabilities. Local and regional AI conferences and workshops, hosted in partnership with international organizations, could help to develop and disseminate knowledge.

- **Capacity building for policymakers** on the implications of AI would help make policies more robust. For example, many policymakers do not know how to develop policies for the safe and responsible collection, use or processing of children's data. General digital literacy skill building is also necessary for public officials who are crafting policies that will ultimately affect children. However, the required knowledge goes beyond basic technical capacity and relates to socio-cultural contexts as well, so that policymakers understand how technology intersects with children's rights, behaviors and societal norms.
- **Greater coordination across government agencies** is essential to address the full impacts of AI on children. This includes an inter-agency approach between the ministries of education, Information and Communications Technology, infrastructure, etc. However, this cooperation can be difficult because there are a lot of ministries with competing priorities. Furthermore, it can be hard to push for swift changes, especially if sectors are unwilling to make short to medium-term adjustments to their policies.

Recommendations

Raise awareness of AI amongst children: It is essential to consider the form in which adults explain AI technologies to children. Based on feedback from the child consultations, children seemed to be very worried about their parents being able to access their digital information and less concerned about governments and businesses accessing and using their data. It was proposed that YouTube influencers could help bring greater awareness about the risks and opportunities of AI systems through engaging content. It was noted that sometimes it is a lack of interest that leads children to be unaware because they think the subject is not relevant to them. Additionally, technology companies should notify their users when AI is being utilized. For example, when children are communicating with a chat bot.

Include children in AI design: Children should be co-creators of technology, but one of the barriers to this is a lack of channels for co-creation. Currently, children do not have clear avenues to express their voices and opinions to developers. It was discussed that solutions could include the introduction of coding programs to school curriculums, as well as inclusion policies at the company level that would allow for children to be involved in the design and testing process of AI technologies, where applicable.

Develop teacher's AI literacy: In Brazil, the Ministry of Education sponsored an initiative for all the teachers in the country to partake in a self-assessment to diagnose their digital skills. It was discovered that most of the teachers surveyed lack basic digital competencies. While this assessment is not specific to AI, such a tool could be translated to the AI field to help government leaders develop more effective teacher trainings. Private partners could help tackle the barrier of limited government funding by co-developing capacity building trainings.

Educate parents and guardians: To address the varied skill levels and understanding parents have of AI-related issues, the creation of toolkits (available both on and offline), was proposed to increase awareness. Parents can utilize this knowledge to help children optimize the opportunities of AI. It was also noted that older parents with a limited understanding of digital technologies are susceptible to hype or misinformation around AI systems, and that this should be acknowledged in the principles.

Encourage multistakeholder cooperation: Cooperation is essential to discover inventive ways to face the challenges outlined above. It is necessary to think creatively when trying to bring together diverse stakeholders, look for common interests and share best practices across the region (especially as countries are at different stages of ICT development). In some countries, governments are leading AI initiatives, while in others, they are spearheaded by academia or the private sector. There are many AI initiatives being developed in Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, the governments of Chile and Brazil are currently drafting their national AI strategies. This is an opportunity for countries to share their approaches and lessons learned with one another. However, although multilateralism is key to progress, it was noted that this can be very challenging due to a global erosion of trust.

Next Steps

UNICEF will host more workshops to gain other regional perspectives on AI and children's issues. Through this consultative process we will develop a draft policy guidance, to be released in August 2020. If you are interested in getting involved in this project, please contact UNICEF at ai4children@unicef.org.

São Paulo Consultation Workshop Report
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